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Founders of Freedom and Their Involvement in Slavery: A Paradox

The founding of the United States is a story romanticized to the point of becoming legend. A group of farmers with some local political experience come to together in both spirit and arms to defy a monarch they charge with tyranny and become one of the first modern self-governed nations. These men wrote words like "all men are created equal," inspiring a generation to risk their lives for the cause of freedom. However, there is a contradiction in these heroes—many of the Founding Fathers (while bringing the ideals of freedom to many) kept Africans in the bondages of slavery. This paradox brings into question the integrity of the founders, and asks the question whether or not owning slaves discredits their efforts made towards liberty. While a paradox can be a contradictory thought or idea that defies logic, another definition of paradox is an entity of that is is always in a state of contradiction—many Virginians of the mid to late eighteenth century exemplify both of these definitions. By looking at the lives of five different Virginians, the situation becomes less black and white, and more shades of grey appear. Overall, it can be argued that many of the Founding Fathers recognized the hypocrisy of owning slaves; several of them made attempts to rectify this wrong. While the Revolution may not have brought immediate change to the lives of blacks in early America, ideas of democratic-republicanism still made it to some of the Founding Fathers in a more complete form, enough for them to see the paradox of slave owning in the United States.

To begin the discussion on Virginian Founding Fathers, it seems appropriate to begin with one of the most well-known, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was a man of the Enlightenment who had dreams of living a life of self-government. He famously wrote one

of the most influential documents of all time, the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson penned the now famous phrase, declaring to the world that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

While the Declaration of Independence declared equality among all, it did not take long to understand the true meaning of this document—that all white men are created equal. At the exact same time that Jefferson made his radical statements on freedom, Jefferson was one of the largest slaveholders in the mainland colonies. How one may deal with the paradox of Jefferson's attitudes towards slavery can be found in John Miller's book *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, where Miller discusses in great detail Jefferson's personal and political attitudes towards slavery as an institution and Jefferson's personal views of blacks.

Miller takes the stance that from his early days as a wide-eyed member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, Jefferson loathed the institution of slavery, but was never an abolitionist. When writing his first draft of the Declaration, Jefferson attempted to blame the existence of slavery on the King of England. [1] While that was not entirely true, it was still an early attempt by an enlightened man to try to explain how a system so deplorable came to be commonplace—by trying to find a patsy on whom to lay the blame. Miller goes so far as to say the reason that Jefferson used the phrase "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" as opposed to directly quoting John Locke's use of the word "property" in place of "happiness" was to keep slave-owners from being able to use the Declaration to preserve slavery, as slaves were legally property, thus making slave ownership an "unalienable right" by Locke's original wording. [2]

At this point, the paradox of Jefferson becomes more complicated. While Jefferson may not have wanted the Declaration to preserve slavery in the society of the newly-formed United States, Jefferson held racist views. There was no moral objection to owning African slaves by Jefferson, as he did not see blacks as equal to whites. While Miller generally takes a soft approach to the issue of Jefferson and slavery, there is no way he can deny that Jefferson held racist attitudes. During the Revolutionary War, Jefferson made it clear that he

did not support blacks being allowed to serve in the Continental Army, as he did not trust blacks with guns.[3]

As a man of the Enlightenment, Jefferson believed that he could analyze the difference between whites and blacks using the scientific method. By doing so, he was certain that he could determine which race was superior at certain tasks, and could then make a definitive statement about which race was better. [4] Naturally, as a white man, Jefferson concluded that Africans were scientifically inferior to whites because unlike white Roman slaves, black slaves in the United States did not create art or poetry.[5] There was even a rumor that Jefferson reported that there was sexual contact between blacks and orangutans in Africa.[6] Miller argues that this "scientific" approach was not in defense of slavery as an institution, but rather how Jefferson personally justified owning slaves.[7]

When it came to owning slaves, it was well known how Jefferson treated them comparatively well. Miller writes that even Jefferson's biggest political rivals were never able to lay claim that we was cruel to his slaves, and that Jefferson instead treated them as one would treat white servants.[8] Jefferson never liked being involved in the buying and selling of slaves, but when he was, he took special care to try to avoid splitting up slave families during the transaction.[9] This attempt to keep families together was often a part of being an "good" slave-owner, but in reality was a more of a moral justification used by slave owners. To enforce the notion that Jefferson went past what was usual for southern slave-owners at the time, Miller describes nail production at Monticello. Occasionally, Jefferson himself would join the young male slaves forging nails right alongside them. If the slaves did an exemplary job, they would be rewarded by their master with extra food, time off, and even sets of clothes. [10] While Jefferson struggled with what implications of owning slaves had on planters, this is a reminder that he was still a man of the Enlightenment; beating slaves into submission was not how he was documented to have behaved, rather he preferred to earn their loyalty despite his personal belief that Africans were inferior to Europeans.

While the treatment of his personal slaves is fascinating, Jefferson's attitudes to the institution of slavery were even more interesting. Jefferson drafted the Ordinance of 1784, which dictated how the United States would divide and use the land west of Appalachian

Mountains. In Jefferson's proposal, there was to be absolutely no slavery or involuntary servitude in these areas after the year 1800.[11] Despite his best efforts, the measure was defeated by a single vote.[12] It should be noted though, that there were gains for plantation owners if the spread of slavery were to stop—if slavery was to be contained in the southern states, those states would have an extremely large economic advantage over the rest of the country. While Miller takes the side that Jefferson supported the legislation out of his hatred of the institution of slavery, it was just as likely that Jefferson was looking out for his own financial interests.

While serving as the third president of the United States, the issue of ending the Atlantic slave trade came up, as preset by the Constitution. Jefferson took great personal pride in being able to claim that the Atlantic slave trade ended under his watch as president, especially because of the fact that it ended on the very first day it was legally possible. [13] This seems to suggest Jefferson saw the ending of the Atlantic slave trade as his justification that he had done something against slavery, while really doing nothing, as this would have happened no matter who was president at the time.

As legislation was introduced by Jefferson and his political contemporizes to limit the reach of slavery as an institution within the United States, it becomes fair to wonder why Jefferson never became an abolitionist instead of being such a paradox. As a man whose livelihood came from owning plantations (and living in debt because of it), there was no way that Jefferson would ever call for abolition without being a complete hypocrite and committing political suicide at the same time. In fact, Miller claims that since Jefferson's wedding gift of land to his daughter included slaves, this was an admission that a plantation in Virginia could not run without slaves and be profitable at the same time.[14]

In the final years of Jefferson's life, he made a statement that the abolition movement could "receive no aid but prayers" from him, although as Jefferson was not a practicing Christian, so the meaning of these words is up for interpretation.[15] Jefferson was a complicated man and a true political and social paradox. Miller seems to defend Jefferson's uneven approach to slavery, fully acknowledging that he supported the use of slaves while disliking the institution of slavery at the same time. While yes, Jefferson made attempts to

keep slavery from expanding, he never made a personal condemnation of the system, or emancipated large numbers of slaves. Jefferson was a Virginia planter who used slavery, and did not seem to have a significant moral quarrel with it, other than how it affected white people, not blacks.

While Jefferson may have never made a bold move on slavery, his contemporary George Washington did. Washington served as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, as a delegate to the Continental Congress, as General of the Continental Army, as President of the Constitutional Convention, and eventually as first President of the United States. After his illustrious career, Washington willingly gave up power and returned to private life. Anything Washington did would set a precedent for how future presidents would lead the United States. Washington was, however, as author Henry Wiencek referred to him, an "imperfect god." While Washington fought for the freedom of the land and was treated as "god-like" by the citizens, Washington held men, women, and children in the bondage of slavery. In Wiencek's book *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*, Wiencek acknowledges this contradiction, but unlike other Virginians, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Washington wrote into his will that his slaves would be freed upon the death of his wife. So the question must be asked why Washington set his most valuable assets free upon his death instead of passing them on to his stepchildren. Wiencek argues that this decision was not something that happened overnight after some sort of moral epiphany, but rather was a general realization after a life spent watching a young America defy the conventional logic of race and slavery that brought Washington to this history-making decision. Wiencek writes of Washington, saying: "Toward the end of his life he grappled with the problem of slavery. His wrenching private conflict over race and slavery was a microcosm of the national struggle—one that is not yet over."[16]

Unlike some other contemporary Virginians, like those hailing from the Robert Carter family, George Washington was not born into immense wealth. This, however, did not deter a young Washington from having ambitions, and he soon picked up the skill of surveying and practiced until we was a master at the art. From the money he made from surveying, Washington rented Mount Vernon from his recently widowed sister-in-law.

Mount Vernon came with both land and a few slaves. It was at this point that Washington became a plantation owner.[17]

Washington was not living at Mount Vernon for long before his close and powerful friend William Fairfax offered Washington a position in the Virginia militia. In the fall of 1753 Washington was dispatched by the colony's Acting Governor to survey an area of the Ohio River so that he could assess the threat of the French in the area. After reporting back with detailed maps, the newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel Washington was again dispatched by the Lt. Governor Robert Dinwiddie in 1754 with 140 men to protect the building of a fort at the forks of the Ohio river to protect the interests of Virginia's Ohio Company of land speculators. Both the Virginia militia and French troops exchanged a volley of gunshots, and an exhilarated Washington had set off a conflict that would come to be known as the French and Indian War.[18] In the last few years of the the war, Washington returned home to Mount Vernon in 1758, with plans to begin his private life, starting with marriage.[19]

In 1759 George Washington married the widow Martha Dandridge Custis.[20] Martha was wealthy from her previous marriage to Daniel Parke Custis, and upon marrying Washington, she brought with her eighty-four dower slaves and the control of six plantations.[21] The estate came with many complexities, as two-thirds of it was to be reserved for Washington's new step-children. Regardless of the legal aspect of it at, Washington was now the owner of a massive plantation system and a large number of African slaves. In 1760, Washington went on to purchase even more slaves.[22]

Plantation life suited Washington well, and unlike other plantation owners who could be content simply reaping the benefits of being wealthy, Washington enjoyed farming, and it was not uncommon at all for Washington to oversee personally the day-to-day operations of Mount Vernon.[23] While the slaves on his plantation were his source of income, Washington did not trust blacks in general.[24] Wiencek credits this distrustfulness of Washington to his suspicion that stealing was rampant among the slaves at Mount Vernon—everything from cloth to livestock seemed to turn up missing.[25] Washington often restrained using the whip himself, but could deal out harsh punishments when he felt there was sufficient evidence.

Despite his distrust of African Americans, Washington's slave force more than doubled between 1760 and 1774, rising from 49 to 135 slaves. [26] Weincek argues that at this point of owning so many slaves, the slaves became more than just labor, they were living status symbols. The number of slaves a planter owned reflected how much status the planter possessed; this was one vice that even Washington was not devoid of according to Weincek.

Being a man alert to his surroundings and the events of the time, Washington feared that war between the colonies and England would break out at any time by 1774.[27] Washington's intuition was correct, and in 1775 he was appointed by the second Continental Congress as the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.[28] From the very onset of the Revolutionary War, the American forces were greatly outnumbered by the British. The New England colonies did provide some African American soldiers, but as Washington's negative image of blacks was always present, they were not welcome, and Washington made efforts to have them removed.[29] Eventually, Washington was persuaded by numerous events to allow free blacks to join the army, and Weincek credits the change in heart at least in part to an African-American woman and poet named Phillis Wheatley.[30]

Wheatley wrote Washington a letter containing beautiful prose that invoked the classic literature Washington enjoyed so much. Seeing the writings of an articulate African-born woman (who was still a slave at the time) moved Washington, and he requested to meet her in his response, which Wheatley accepted and went to Valley Forge.[31] Wincek argues that while this was not a moment that would immediately turn Washington's life around, it was a substantial step towards the softening of his heart that led to the eventual emancipation of his slaves. While it may not have been true causation, there certainly seemed to be a degree of correlation between the receiving of Wheatley's poetry and Washington's gradual acceptance of black soldiers in the army. This decision may have saved both Washington's life and the entire American cause as it was a group of black sailors under the command of Colonel John Glover who rescued Washington and the men under his command from certain defeat during a misguided campaign in New York.[32] This same sailing crew aided Washington directly a second time, as it was Glover's men who ferried Washington and his forces across the Delaware Christmas night, 1776.[33]

Washington was indeed in debt to the heroics of Glover's crew, and perhaps this was another moment where Washington was able to see humanity in the very people he generally distrusted. Throughout the war, Washington became close with many of his advisors and fellow generals, but with none was there so much mutual respect and adoration as there was with the Marquis de Lafayette. When the war ended, Lafayette pleaded for Washington to set an example and emancipate his slaves, hoping that it might set a precedent for others who might do the same.[34] If this request had come from anyone else, Washington could have easily dismissed it, but Washington respected Lafayette like an adopted son. While Washington's official response to the plea after the Constitutional Convention was that there existed "no greater evil than [political] disunion" (meaning to leave a delicate situation alone rather than risk the political battle which would certainly follow), Lafayette's words would never leave his mind.[35]

It was on April 14, 1789 that George Washington officially got word that he had been elected president of the United States. When he left Mount Vernon for the then capital of New York, George and Martha brought with them a personal detail of slaves.[36] In 1793, President Washington signed into law the Fugitive Slave Act (of 1793), allowing planters to capture runaway slaves anywhere they sought refuge.[37] In a spectacularly ironic twist, Martha Washington's personal slave Ona Judge escaped only three years later, and George Washington was unable to get Ona returned to Martha despite the law.

It was upon George Washington's death in 1799 later that Washington's decision to free his slaves was made public by his executers. Washington had been devising a plan to release his slaves as early as 1794, when he first believed that he was dying. There was a span of five years until his actual death that Washington could have put a stop to his radical plan, but he did not.[38] By this point, Washington was firm in his convictions that he was going to do his part in abolishing slavery, and even had stipulations that the old and infirm slaves were to be cared for until their deaths.[39] As Washington's will stated that his slaves were to be freed after Martha's death, Martha may have been genuinely afraid for her own life. As Martha's death was the only thing between slaves and their freedom, Martha could worry

that she might be killed by a slave in order to expedite their emancipation. So, Martha freed all the slaves in her possession—not just the ones who belonged exclusively to her husband.

While it may not have been in his lifetime, and not exactly the statement that Lafayette had hoped it would have been, Washington freed his slaves; that emancipation should in no way be viewed by historians lightly. While it may seem half-hearted for a man of Washington's stature to do so only after he, and Martha were no longer alive to suffer the repercussions, upon further examination, the courage it took to write a document defying the majority view in the American South just may be the bravest thing Washington ever did. Washington defied many expectations of what was considered "typical" for a southerner throughout his life, so it seems fitting that he continued to do so in death. The life of George Washington indeed contained so many moments that would change both his heart and his mind that Wiencek's theory that it was a lifetime of gradual change rather than a moment of sudden inspiration that led Washington to emancipate his slaves not only holds merit, but makes possibly the strongest case as to why Washington did what he did.

While proponents of abolition certainly would have liked to have seen Washington free his slaves while still alive, Washington's will still provides a fascinating look into the mind of a man who has become legend. Although Washington did not free slaves in his lifetime, Robert Carter III, descendent of Robert "King" Carter I of Virginia, did. Carter owned more slaves than Washington and Jefferson combined, and when he came face to face with the paradox of being a slave owner and a Democratic-Republican, Carter took the truly enlightened path; he freed his slaves, all of them. The story of Robert Carter has gone almost completely untold for nearly 200 years, which is why author Andrew Levy felt the need to tell it in full in his book *The First Emancipator: The Forgotten Story of Robert Carter, the Founding Father Who Freed His Slaves*. Levy argues that through his truly eventful life, Robert Carter began to see his slaves not as property, but as family—brothers and sisters in the eyes of God, and that once Carter gradually made this realization, abolition for his slaves was a matter of "when" not "if".

To begin his book, Levy makes note of the fact that Robert Carter III was born into wealth, which in the eighteenth century South meant that he was born in a slaveholding

family. At the age of only three months, Carter III had been given a slave girl by his grandfather, Robert Carter I. [40] By the time he was twenty one years old, Robert Carter III had amassed over sixty-five-thousand acres of land in Virginia, and a labor force consisting of over one hundred slaves, all of whom he inherited from his father and his grandfather.[41] Unlike his fellow Virginians, such as Washington and Jefferson, Carter had a lot of trouble with his public image. To begin his career in politics, Carter began where any Virginian would—running for a seat in the House of Burgesses. It became evident how unpopular Carter was when during his fourth run for office he received only seven votes.[42] The young Carter was, in essence, an early version of the modern playboy; he did not care for studying, was a noted gambler, and was entirely content as to live on of his grandfather's wealth rather than make his own.[43] Levy argues that Carter's public display of this lifestyle did not set well with his fellow Virginians, and was the cause as to why he could not get elected to the House of Burgesses, despite carrying the illustrious Carter family name. It was at this point, Levy argues, that Carter began to take politics more seriously. For instance, Carter married the wealthy heiress Frances Tasker of Baltimore to acquire even more status, and began to make friends in high places both in England and in the colonies. It would not take long for these moves to land him in the illustrious House of Burgesses.[44]

After becoming situated in his new political position, Carter found himself in a whole new predicament. Between having connections in both England and Virginia, Carter enjoyed being an intermediary between crown and colony.[45] While enjoying the best of both worlds for as long as he could, in the 1770s, Carter knew that eventually he would have to pick which side would receive his full loyalty. Fears of the new political extremism being exercised by Lord Dunmore, Virginia's governor, and the rapidly worsening economy in the colonial South eventually pushed Carter towards the side of the colonists.[46] By 1774, Levy claims that Carter was a true rebel.[47]

When Robert Carter III became a supporter of the rebel cause in 1774, he suddenly became another question mark in American history: how could an enlightened man who supports freedom own other human beings? In the case of Carter, this question may not be quite as paradoxical, as early on, Carter engaged in a very progressive style of slave owning.

Instead of threatening his slaves with the whip, Carter instead would use incentives such as cash to encourage his slaves to give up their day off.[48] Slaves living on the Carter plantation had the freedom to marry whomever they chose, train their children in trades, and when censuses were performed on his slaves, Carter grouped them by families instead of as individuals.[49] This seems to suggest that Carter saw slaves to have a higher value when the family was preserved, rather than breaking families up and selling each family member individually. When an epidemic of smallpox made its way towards Virginia, Carter paid out of his own pocket to have his slaves inoculated.[50] While these practices certainly made him a "good master," this is not too far from the practices of other liberal slaveholders, such as Jefferson. Carter inoculating his slaves serves him on two fronts; it helped him keep a good public image with other slave owners, as well as being "humanitarian" in his own eyes towards his slaves. It would take a much deeper, more personal revelation to make Carter the radical that he eventually became.

By the late 1770s, Carter was beginning to become more and more dissatisfied with established religion, in this case, The Church of England in Virginia. In fact at this point it would be easy to consider Carter a Deist, believing in the Watchmaker God who simply viewed his creation unwind without intervening.[51] Carter's exploration into other religious interpretations brought him into a branch of Christianity that was just barely beginning to take hold—despite hostile resistance by the planter class in the colonial South, Baptism. After much deliberation, Carter became a Baptist publicly in front of a crowd of hundreds on September 6th, 1778.[52] It is at this precise point Levy argues that the path of Carter's life began to take a detour from the path of other wealthy slave owners in Virginia, describing Carter as having "turned away from Jefferson's religion, and to the religion of Jefferson's slaves" instead.[53]

After becoming a Baptist, Carter's life began to undergo noticeable changes, perhaps the biggest being that he gave up his hobbies of music and dancing in order to spend more time in prayer and Biblical studies.[54] Not even a year after his religious transformation, Carter was struck by the death of his son Ben, who was, as Levy hints, Carter's favorite and the one most likely to inherit most of his father's fortune.[55] Pushing his father Robert Carter

III further into emotional turmoil, another son became indebted because of gambling not long after his brother Ben died. To help settle some of these debts, Bob Carter sold off some of the slaves co-owned by him and his father, disregarding his father's principle to keep families together in the process.[56] The transgressions by Bob deeply wounded Robert Carter emotionally, and it is said that he never fully forgave his son for these actions.[57]

Between the deaths and offences of his children, Robert Carter grew ever closer to his slaves. He soon saw himself as the "father" to both his biological children and his slaves.[58] By the time Carter's fourth daughter was to marry, her dowry contained no land, slaves, or stock as the dowries of the first three did, rather, it was comprised only of cash.[59] This move to eliminate slaves from the dowry is described by Levy as a further attempt not to split up his slave force, and was perhaps foreshadowing the biggest, most radical move Carter would make in his entire life.

In August of 1791, Robert Carter III drafted one of the most under-appreciated documents of American history, the Deed of Gift.[60] The Deed of Gift was a simply written document that outlined a timeframe for complete manumission of all Carter's slaves, which numbered over 400 in the year 1785.[61] While Carter may not may not be remembered today for being the most articulate writer, he did not mince words, and in the first paragraph of The Deed of Gift, Carter wrote, "I have for some time past been convinced to retain them in Slavery is contrary to the true Principles of Religion and Justice, and that therefor [sic] it was my Duty to manumit them."[62]

There were no ulterior motives in the case of Robert Carter III; he did not free his slaves to gain some political advantage. There was no financial gain from the release of over 400 slaves. Carter released them using his own fortune, lending them money when necessary, and allowing them to become wage laborers on his land if they did not want to try to start a new life somewhere other than Virginia.[63] This clearly shows that once the slaves were free Carter did not brush off his hands and call it a day; rather, he deeply cared about what happened to his Baptist "brothers and sisters." Robert Carter III not only broke the mold of what was to be expected behavior of southern aristocracy, he shattered it. Jefferson very famously described slavery in the United States as holding "the wolf by the ears," meaning

one cannot let go without being bit, yet at the same time one cannot hold on indefinitely. In his personal and professional life at least, Carter released the wolf that he held by the ears. Yes, Carter was bit by the wolf in a financial sense, and when Carter died on March 10th of 1804 in Baltimore in conditions much more moderate than the ones he was born into, the result of Carter spending vast amounts of his fortune to emancipate his slaves.[64] However, Levy is unfaltering in his argument that Carter took the actions that he did because Carter believed that it was the right thing to do. Carter was not the kind of man to let those whom he considered to be his family suffer in slavery. Carter was not just another rich planter from Virginia; Carter was truly an abolitionist at heart.

Carter's freeing of his slaves made him a radical in Virginia, especially because Carter freed his slaves while he was still alive. However, there are two other Virginians who may be even more radical than Carter. While some planters were steadfast in their acceptance of slavery, there are exceptions found in both St. George Tucker and Richard Randolph of Virginia. While not related by blood, Tucker became Randolph's step-father, raising his stepson on the beliefs and ideals of the Enlightenment., and the Democratic-Republican government spawned by this new way of thinking.[65] Unlike Jefferson, both Tucker and Randolph found the new democratic-republican government of the United States and slavery to be entirely incompatible with each other, and unlike many of their contemporaries, both Tucker and Randolph were willing to take radical steps to stand by this very belief.

St. George Tucker has often been cited as an early abolitionist by many prominent historians, such as Paul Finkelman, but Tucker often seems to be reduced to a footnote used as a foil to Thomas Jefferson. Now while Tucker is most certainly a foil to Jefferson on the legal aspect of slavery, it is in Charles T. Cullen's dissertation, *George Tucker and Law in Virginia, 1772-1804*, that Tucker is presented as a moral foil as well. While Jefferson seemed to have no problem justifying slavery in America; Tucker did.

Cullen argues that Tucker found there to be a discrepancy between the ideas of the American Revolution and it's actual practice—not all men could be created equally if slavery existed.[66] Being an articulate and classically trained lawyer, Tucker did not mince words when it came to his views on slavery: "Whilst we were offering up vows at the shrine of

liberty we were imposing upon our fellow men, who differ in complexion from us, a *slavery*, ten thousand times more cruel than the utmost extremity of those grievances and oppressions, of which we complained." In case there was any doubt left as to what he was implying, Tucker later concludes his *Dissertation on Slavery, With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It, in the State of Virginia (1796)*: "Hence it will appear how perfectly irreconcilable a state of slavery is to the principles of democracy, which, form the *basis* and *foundation* of our government. But surely it is time that we should admit the evidence of moral truth, and learn to regard them as our fellow men, and equals."[67]

With crystal clarity St. George Tucker, a fellow Virginian, drove a metaphorical sword straight into Jefferson's own *Notes on the State of Virginia*, defying both Jefferson's "scientific" explanation for slavery, and all other moral justifications. As the subtitle of The Dissertation suggests, Tucker includes a proposal for gradual abolition sixty-seven years prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. Tucker's plan would have freed slaves very gradually over the course of one-hundred-and-five years. After Tucker's plan would commence, all females born afterwards and all of those females' children would become free at the age of twenty-eight. After freedom, however, blacks would still not enjoy equal civil rights, rather, they would instead be subject to black codes.[68] While this painfully slow plan may bring into question Tucker's sincerity towards abolition, Cullen argues that Tucker made considerable moral concessions when it came to the timeframe for abolition in exchange for the greater good of the cause saying that Tucker preferred extremely gradual abolition to there being no abolition at all.[69]

Unfortunately, Tucker's plan for gradual abolition was never put into place by the Virginia government, and was dismissed by nearly the entire Virginia state legislature. Though it never went any further than a plan on paper, St. George Tucker proved that a well-respected Virginian could campaign for abolition, and recognize the paradox of slavery existing in a supposedly free nation. Southerners were not just merely "products of their time" or "ignorant to their errors"—Tucker proves that enlightened men knew very well what was going on, but chose to ignore it. The idealism of Tucker was not lost entirely, rather it inspired another Virginian abolitionist, Richard Randolph, Tucker's own step-son.

In *Israel on the Appomattox*, Ely specifically points to two men who helped shape Randolph's views on slavery—his teacher George Wythe, and his stepfather St. George Tucker.[70] Randolph took a fiery approach to casting the blame for slavery: blame American citizens directly for having "exercised the most lawless and monstrous tyranny" over African American Slaves.[71] Using charged words such as "tyranny" in his scorching deposition on slavery, Randolph invoked the very recent memories of the Revolutionary War, the ideals of which Randolph believed Americans had betrayed by continuing slavery in the United States.[72]

Ely challenges those who would claim that Randolph's decision to emancipate his slaves was out of guilt. To use Ely's own words, Randolph was a "dyed-in-the-wool moralist", and believed whole-heartedly in the cause of abolition.[73] Upon his death, Randolph's wife Judith did not question her husband's desire for emancipation, and was essential to Randolph's master plan.[74] Unfortunately, much of Richard Randolph's written work was lost in a fire, so the world will most likely never know all the details of the master plan, Israel Hill.[75] Israel Hill was the ultimate experiment in black freedom—a plot of 350 acres of land for the emancipated slaves of Richard Randolph to live on and use as they saw fit.[76]

The actions of St. George Tucker and Richard Randolph are two of the most unique Virginians of their time; not only were they morally opposed to slavery while living in a slave society, they made deliberate attempts to chip away at slavery by any means possible. These enlightened men found slavery to be entirely incompatible with the Revolution, and instead of leaving it as a conundrum for their descendants to deal with in the future, both Tucker and Randolph decided to make a stand for their beliefs, despite how unpopular they would be with their neighbors. Tucker and Randolph were the anti-Jeffersons of their time— men who believed that "all men are created equal" truly applied to all men, as evident by their attempts to being abolition to a young United States.

Of the five men, four of them granted abolition to their slaves in one way or another. It would be an overreaching assumption to say that the actions of Washington, Carter, Tucker, and Randolph were typical; in fact they were incredibly atypical. The important

implication of these early abolitionists is that, unlike the claims of Thomas Jefferson, they believed abolition of slavery was indeed possible in the years following the American Revolution. While yes, the majority of southern founders (and many northern founders for that matter) had no objection to slavery, there was no "group think" mentality that universally to all of these men. Some of the founders did see the paradox between having a democratic-republican government and slavery at the same time, and rather than ignore it, they addressed it head on.

References

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[16] Henry Wiencek, An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 13

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[42] Ibid., 16-17

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[58] Ibid., 125

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[61] Ibid., 111

[62] Ibid., 144

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[66]Charles T. Cullen, St. George Tucker and Law in Virginia, 1772-1804. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1987), 150

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